



Center for
Scientific Review

2021 CSR Incoming Chair Orientation

Brief Overview - Key Issues In Peer Review

Noni Byrnes, Ph.D.

Director, Center for Scientific Review

Agenda

20-minutes

Introductions, Overview of CSR – Integrity and Fairness in Peer Review

15-minutes

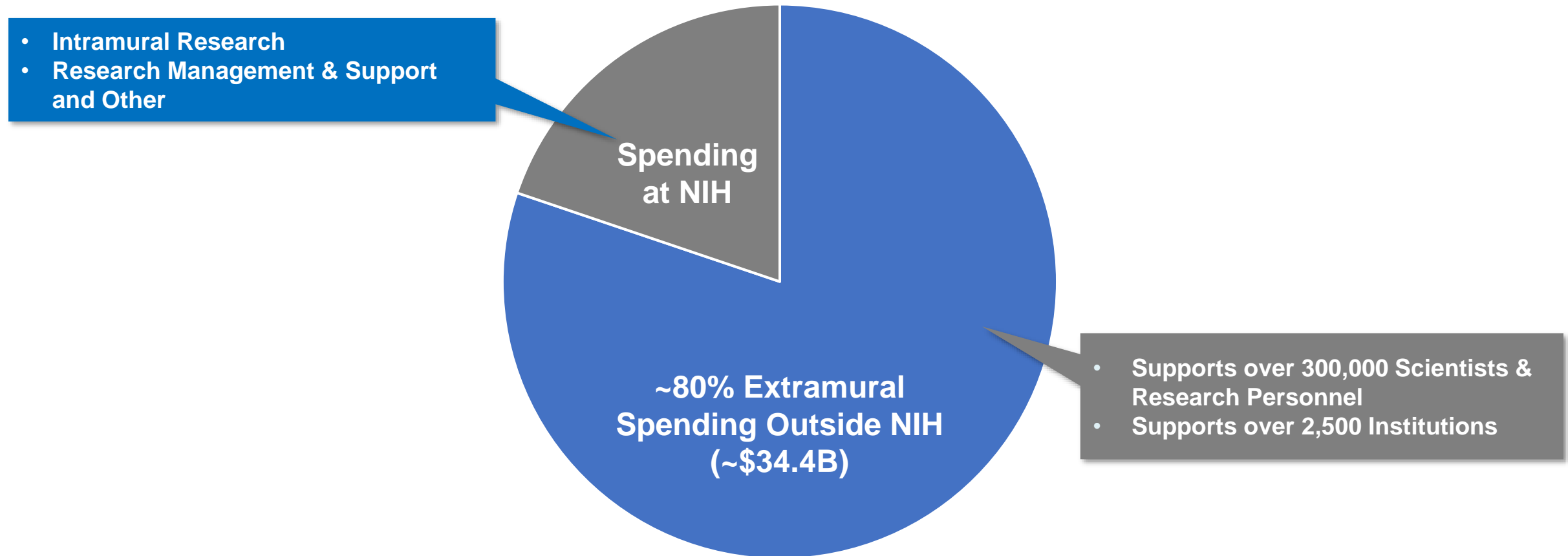
Preparing to Chair – Dr. Bruce Reed

85-minutes

Discussion – Facilitators

The Critical Importance of Peer Review – The Main Driver of NIH Extramural Funding

FY 2021 NIH Budget: \$42.9 Billion



CSR reviews >75% of all applications for NIH extramural funding (~ 65,000 per year)

CSR's Mission



Center for
Scientific Review

To ensure that NIH grant applications receive fair, independent, expert, and timely scientific reviews - free from inappropriate influences - so NIH can fund the most promising research.

Integrity in the Peer Review Process



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Integrity of the Peer Review Process

Critically important for all of us

- Maintaining the public trust in the NIH's stewardship of taxpayer dollars to support U.S. biomedical science research
- Confidentiality is critical for candor in discussion and evaluation, and thus impacts the very basis of the peer review process
- NIH is taking this issue very seriously— not a widespread problem, but increased reporting/action – culture change
- Needs support of the entire research community – investigators, reviewers, chairs, NIH staff, institutional officials

Integrity of the Peer Review Process

What is the NIH Doing?



ACTIONS

- Following up on every allegation

Actions have included

- *Deferral of application*
- *Withdrawal of application*
- *Removal from serving on peer review committees*
- *Notifying the institution of the PI or reviewer, which has led to personnel actions*
- *Pursuing government-wide suspension and disbarment, or referral to other agencies for criminal violations*



PRO-ACTIVE MEASURES

- *Review Integrity Officer*
- *Enhanced Reporting – SRO signature*
- *Enhanced SRO awareness and training*
- *Tighter IT controls*
- *Outreach to scientific community – culture change*
- **Online Peer Review Integrity Training Module for Reviewers (launched 2020)**

Integrity of the Peer Review Process

What Can You Do As Chair?

- Reiterate SRO's message about need for absolute confidentiality of the meeting materials and proceedings – scores, discussions, application content, critiques
- No ex parte hallway or dinner discussions about applications under review (in Zoom: without the entire panel assembled and the SRO present) – model good behavior yourself, call it out when you see it, change the culture, tell the SRO.
- Be prudent about accepting seminar invitations from applicants while their application is under review.
- Err on the side of caution – report any potential violations to your SRO, or the CSR Review Integrity Officer csrrio@mail.nih.gov or the NIH Review Policy Officer at reviewpolicyofficer@mail.nih.gov.

You and the NIH: **Fairness** in the Peer Review Process



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CSR's Initiatives to Promote Fairness in Review

- **“Bias awareness in review” training for SROs, reviewers *coming in Aug 2021***
- Diversifying and broadening the pool of reviewers
- Exploring decoupling the science from the investigator/environment
- **Reporting instances of bias – in application review, or in study section meeting**

Learning Objectives

We hope this training will:

- ✓ Make you aware of potential sources of bias in peer review.
- ✓ Provide you some tools to intervene if and when, you think you see bias in review.
- ✓ Make you aware of reporting avenues for concerns about bias.



progress bar - coming soon



Review Matters

CSR's Commitment to Advancing Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in Peer Review



Noni Byrnes
Director
March 3, 2021

On March 1, NIH Director Francis Collins [announced](#) NIH's broad-based initiative, [UNITE](#), to end structural racism and racial inequities in biomedical science. This is a recognition of the need for urgent, sustained effort on many fronts across the research

Review Matters: <https://www.csr.nih.gov/reviewmatters/2021/03/03/csrs-commitment-to-advancing-equity-diversity-and-inclusion-in-peer-review/>

Reporting Bias in Peer Review

With ~1.5k meetings, ~65k apps, ~18k reviewers, ~200k critiques, mistakes will occur.

For issues related to respectful interactions, bias or anything else that could affect the fairness of the review process, contact your SRO or the CSR Associate Director of Diversity & Workforce Development at G.Fosu_AssocDir@csr.nih.gov.

Existing CSR policy regarding a potentially flawed/biased review

Assessment by CSR management – is it a flawed review?

- Yes - CSR re-reviews the application in the same council round.
- No – **CSR refers PI to program officer for guidance on council appeal process**



Gabriel Fosu, Ph.D.

- On every outgoing staff email
- On CSR's website
- On every study section page

Fairness of the Peer Review Process

What Can You Do As Chair?

- Recognize your influence – actively promote a positive study section culture
- **Inclusion:** Actively encourage broader participation/inclusion across the committee – call on quieter, or mid-career/junior reviewers
- **Respect:** Intervene if you hear a reviewer questioning another reviewer's scientific expertise or being dismissive. Scientific disagreement and a robust discussion is good – but should be done in a respectful manner.
- **Review Criteria:** Maintain focus of discussion on the review criteria *in the context of* the proposed work: *e.g. Investigator is not about general reputation but demonstrated ability to carry out the project; Environment is not about prestige of the institution but whether the resources are there to support to proposed work.*

Q/A, Discussion, Comments
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